

How the Germans Defend Buildings

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ORTONA is a small seaside town on the east coast of Italy about forty miles north of Rome. The Canadians who landed there had plenty of street-fighting, and what they have to say about Ortona gives us some valuable tips about German methods of defending buildings.

As at Cassino, the Hun seems to have studied the Russian tactics at Stalingrad with profit. He has learned how to use mines, interconnected with tunnels. Many people who landed at Ortona expected to find lots of concrete pillboxes—but not one was encountered. You know how reports get round; because every house in a west coast town was found to have been turned into a pillbox and in some cases dummy villas had

been built round concrete works, pillboxes have become all the rage and people expect to find them everywhere.

Far from it. One of the big lessons of Ortona was: Don't expect to find the same thing twice.

The Canadians at Ortona noticed that the Hun used what he had got. He dug slit trenches and machine-gun posts outside houses, fifty to a hundred yards away, siting them so that all sides of the house were covered by cross-fire. He sandbagged the lower floors of houses and used them as pillboxes. Sometimes, too, he dug slit trenches *inside* houses on the ground floor or basement, making it extremely difficult for the Canadians to knock out the defenders.

In one instance, a machine gun was mounted on a table and built in by sandbags within the room itself, with a field of fire

There may be an antitank gun, too, either in the rubble across the road or in the side street, sited to fire at point-blank range.

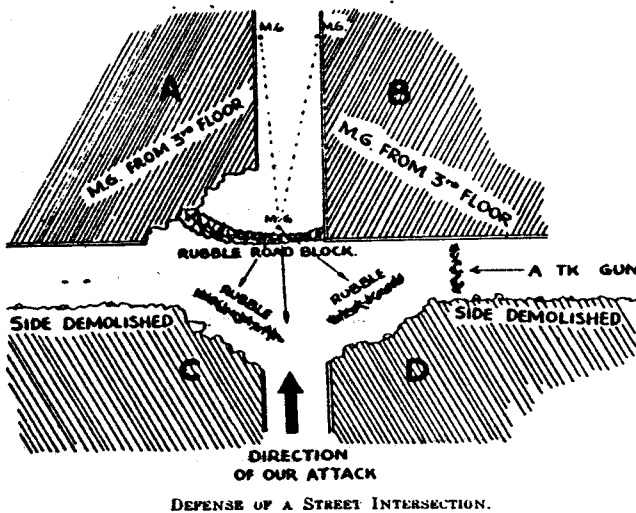
What with this and mines and booby traps liberally sprinkled about the rubble piles, attacking tanks have an exceedingly tough time of it. The houses themselves are booby-trapped, of course, and time bombs are by no means uncommon.

Notice how the Germans vary their defenses of buildings according to the type of town and houses. North Ortona is more modern—wider streets and numerous open squares—and this part of the town was the tougher problem for the attackers.

Here the enemy defenses centered on a series of strong-points, heavily armed with machine guns covering all streets

and squares. Some buildings had been demolished to increase the field of fire, and the rubble in the streets invariably sheltered two or three more machine-gun posts, which were supported by the machine guns sited in nearby houses.

Manholes (or "mouseholes" as they were nicknamed) were skilfully used by the defenders. They were just big enough for a man to crawl through, and linked room to room and house to house. They allowed quick entrance and exit and the Germans used them to re-occupy houses already cleared so that they could harass the Canadians from the rear. German night raiders and demolition parties also wriggled, unseen, in and out through these "mouseholes," which were not always spotted at first by the troops who were clearing the houses, and which were often concealed behind furniture.



through the window. Heaven help the poor devils who had to fire it; the noise must have jiggered up their eardrums for days afterwards.

Ortona, a typical Italian town, is a honeycomb of intersections and little streets and small blocks of houses. Most houses had cellars, as many as six being linked together by underground passages. The main defenses were closely-knit mutually-supporting machine-gun positions covering all intersections.

The diagram shows a typical street crossing. The corners of "A," "C," and "D" blocks have been destroyed to provide rubble for closing the road. The sides of blocks "C" and "D" have been blown so that the attackers cannot bring observed fire on to the German positions. The defenders have machine guns on the second and third stories of blocks "A" and "B," and there's another machine gun firing from behind the rubble in the road.